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## DO WE LIVE TOO FAST ?

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WHICH one among us, as he looks abroad at the country he is so proud of ; as he reads the history of the short national life ; as he marks the deeds of Americans that have made its pages stand out in the records of mankind ; as he thinks of the heroes and patriots who have led and governed this people ; as he remembers the furnace of civil war in whose glowing depths the manhood,—aye, and the womanhood, too, of the nation were tried ; as he ponders over the growth, the strength, the intelligence, the wealth, the genius, the power of the United States,—which one among us does not feel an added heart-beat of pride and exultation as he realizes that he is an American ?

It is trite to say the power of a nation is but the aggregate of the powers of its individual citizens, yet it is none the less profoundly true. It is a physical law that the union of diverse stocks will produce the strongest progeny. Under this law we should have the strongest blood on earth, for no nation is composed of so many and so diverse strains. In our government, which is but the will of the people, we have absolutely no restraint on our development. It is for us to will and then to do ; there is nothing we need fear, nothing that will be a bar to our advancement. In material wealth we have one of the richest countries in the world ; our resources have not yet seen ten per cent of their possible development. In geographical position we are absolutely independent ; we are not cursed by neighbors whom we must dread. We are as safe from attack as it is possible for a nation to be. We have in our climate the very best range of the temperate zone, and we have every reason to be healthy. Individually the race of life is equally open to all ; its prizes, honors, emoluments are for the man who can take them. Under

such circumstances, physical, social, and moral, we should produce the most effective race the world has ever seen. The question is, and it is a question of the most vital importance to one and all of us who love this land of ours,—are we producing that race?

The distinguishing characteristic of the American of to-day is his practicality. He demands as a result of his labor a tangible reward, and for the most part he seeks it in material prosperity; and the American pursues the Almighty Dollar with an energy, a zeal, a persistence, that is amazing. But he can sacrifice it as a duty or from sentiment. The civil war proved what Americans would do for their country; the pension lists speak loudly as to their gratitude; the vast sums which have been raised for the unfortunate answer for their charity; the billions of money spent for education show their sense of duty. In the main, though, the American strives for wealth as the great reward in life.

But the free competition and the social environment that make it possible have between them driven the pace up to a fearful speed. The American works harder than does any other man or woman on earth. His business is always with him, he has no rest, no cessation, no relief from the strain. Were he to reduce the effort, his competitors would pass him at once. This and the fact that the rewards are so rich, so sure, so quickly won, stimulate him to his greatest effort all the time. He has been aptly likened to a steam engine running constantly under a forced draught. His daily routine is one of intense and ever-present excitement. He must have a stimulus even in his recreations. The most exciting books, dramas whose gorgeousness of setting and sensational character of plot rival the dreams of Eastern tellers of tales, athletic games that demand the utmost effort, horses whose speed is that of railroad trains, yachts that fly over the surface of the sea,—these and a thousand other things, all intense, all startling, all sensational, are the occupation of his leisure hours.

What is the outcome? To supply his rapidly exhausted system he is compelled to consume large quantities of rich food and to stimulate himself with alcoholic beverages. One of three results almost inevitably follows:

*First*, He becomes an inebriate and is destroyed by the alcoholic poison he consumes.

*Second*, Escaping the pitfall of acquired drunkenness, he rapidly impairs his digestive organs by his abuse of food, and in

consequence of this his stomach and intestines no longer properly perform their functions. His system does not receive its proper nourishment and he soon literally burns out.

*Third*, He starts on his career with a robust digestion not easily deranged. The over-indulgence of his appetite crowds upon the excretory apparatus an amount of work that sooner or later embarrasses and disorders it. Matter that should be cast out is retained in the body and forms unwholesome tissue. Fat is accumulated. The muscular system undergoes what is termed "fatty degeneration." The heart may become affected. The kidneys may become diseased, or the overworked digestive system refuses to perform its functions. Now, the digestive organs are controlled by a very important system of nerves, and the nervous balance (if I may be allowed this term) of these is disarranged. This gives rise to all kind of nervous phenomena,—insomnia, neuralgia, and hysterical symptoms. The name "nervous exhaustion," or "neurasthenia," has been coined to describe the condition into which this overworked, overstimulated man gets.

The American has little time to attend to bodily ailments. If some urgent symptom or an acute attack of disease compels him to consult a physician, the latter is required to "patch him up" as soon as possible. Thus urged, the doctor treats his symptoms instead of the disease, symptoms which in the main are only danger signals set by nature to warn the patient of the deeper-seated, more insidious malady that threatens his well-being. The American physician differs in no respect from the rest of his countrymen. His aim is to produce direct and immediate results, to cut away the shackles that incapacitate his patient for the race. His patients are accustomed to expect much of him, and he does much—not infrequently too much. He is the most accomplished repairer in the world. He can tinker up a worn-out system and keep it running long after it should have been laid away for a thorough rest and a re-creation.

The specific ailments of American women not only manifest themselves locally, but they intensify these affections of the nervous system, and make more serious the train of nervous symptoms caused by the digestive disorders already described. For this American life of ours is far more wearing on women than on men. They take less exercise ; they have, as a

rule, more nervous organization ; they are intensely affected by the strain. Two, or at the most three, children born, and the mother is a physical wreck, a curse to herself and a trial to those around her. She ages soon, far sooner than she should—a chronic invalid, she drags her weary days along. Oh, the pity of it ! Yet the physician is almost powerless, he can but look on and grieve.

The children of these nervous parents inherit their weaknesses and are even more nervous than their progenitors, but their abilities are more keenly practical and their ambitions are higher. They are precocious and burn with a brighter fire that soon consumes them. Not infrequently, however, when the parents have been utterly “burnt out” before the little ones were born, the offspring are dull and stupid, or develop insane or criminal tendencies. The children of remarkably brilliant men are rarely noted for their abilities. That strength and virile power to which the children had the most sacred of claims, they have been robbed of by the rush, the struggle of our American life.

Not only does the American carry on his work under the spurs of food and climate, for this rich nitrogenous food of which he eats is a stimulant for a time ; he has in the modern magazines and newspapers a mental spur constantly applied, the effect of which it would be impossible to overrate. For,—think of it a moment—every morning and every evening the sheets,—four pages, eight pages, sixteen pages—damp from the flying presses,—come to him filled with new thoughts, new events, new matter for the mind to dwell on. The experience of the world during the day is gathered that he may think. Facts ranging in importance from a block on the Elevated to the death of thousands of people by famine are there for him to read. New mercantile enterprises, many affecting his business, his profits, his very place in life, and his ability to support those who are dependent on him, give him subject for anxious thought.

The strain of all this, the stimulation of the mind which comes from it, would be something wonderful to us were we not so accustomed to it. The news alone is enough even if it be not personal. It devours a large part of our nervous force ;—it is a fact that a portion of the strength we derive from our breakfast is expended while reading the morning paper. It is necessary in many cases to give the brain rest, to deprive it of the stimulant

our modern life over-doses it with. "To my mind," said Dr. George F. Shrady to me once, "one of the chief benefits a patient may derive from a trip to Europe is to be found in the fact that there are no newspapers published on ocean steamers."

I find it somewhat difficult to convey to my readers the importance which the stimulation of the brain by newspapers assumes in my mind. I can, however, illustrate it by quoting what a patient of mine said to me once. She was suffering from a form of disease too common among American women. She had been telling me of the work her grandmother, who was the wife of a New England farmer, had been accustomed to all her life, and I said, jokingly, "It's a pity you have not got your grandmother's strength. One per cent. of such work would lay you up for a month." She looked at me for a moment and then said, "Do you realize that my grandmother never read anything except her Bible and hymn book?" The question suggested an idea to me that was new and I asked her what she meant. "Why," she said, "If I find in the paper in the morning some horrible story of a crime or disaster, it interests me very much. I am sorry for the sufferers. I seem to feel their pain in some way. Well, after such a story I have less strength for several hours. I find I must lie down and rest before I can begin my work for the day. It actually tires me out exactly as a shopping trip will tire me."

With the body nourished by rich food, the whole being stimulated by the climate, and the brain spurred on by the news of the world, let us see what this man, so nourished, stimulated, and driven, has done in his pursuit of material good. The following table shows the wealth of the United States and the wealth per capita on the dates given :

Date.	Aggregate wealth.	Per capita.
1850 .....	\$7,135,780,228	\$308
1860 .....	16,159,616,068	514
1870 .....	30,068,518,507	780
1880 .....	43,642,000,000	870

In thirty years' time, less than half the Biblical allowance of man's life, the United States has multiplied its wealth six times, and has nearly trebled that per capita. What energy, what work, what unceasing effort has been needed to bring about this marvellous result!

What can we do to retard this development of the brain and nerves at the expense of the body? Obviously it is impossible to change our surroundings, to change our food, to lessen the drive

of our modern life, to relieve the strain on the mind, to make the competition less fierce. It is apparent, then, that as we cannot lessen the strain, we must increase the ability to undergo it. We must, as a people, learn to understand this ; that while we drive the brain we must build the body. The methods of doing this are so simple that they are apt to be overlooked ; they may be summed up in two words,—exercise and fresh air. We must teach our children to exercise until it becomes a habit, a second nature, a something that when omitted causes real physical distress, and we must choose a form of exercise which is adapted to persons of middle age as well as to children.

The form of exercises which I should recommend is one of three, the dumb bells, Indian clubs, or the chest weights. Of the three the last is the best, because every muscle of the body can be worked with them. They should be a part of the furniture of every house, and the children should be given half an hour at them morning and evening. These children should be taught, too, to use them properly ; to exercise the muscles of the arms, thighs, abdomen and legs in turn. Out-door sports and recreative pursuits should be judiciously encouraged. One month, at least, in every twelve, should be spent in rest. Sundays and other holidays should be observed as days of rest and recreation.

Fresh air and exercise are of even greater importance for the girls than for the boys, if such a thing be possible. The girls will find their reward for the work when they become young ladies in society, in the bright eyes, clear complexions, stately carriage, graceful walk and perfect health which they will enjoy. More than that, when the time comes in their lives that they need all their strength they will find they have a reserve which will not fail them, and their children will be healthy and strong.

Build up the body, build up the body ! In our modern life, this should be dinned into the ears of all until it is obeyed, for, verily, unless we build up the body, the strain on the brain will ruin the American people. The very elements in ourselves that have made us great, the push, the drive, the industry, the mental keenness, the ability and the willingness to labor,—these contain in them the seeds of national death. No race may endure that has not the stamina and power of the healthy animal. The American race has run too much to brain.

CYRUS EDSON.